



*The View From the Forge:
January 2008*

Hello, my name is Quinn Kess, Park Guide at Valley Forge National Historical Park. I'd like to welcome you to "The View from the Forge" – a monthly podcast of news and events from Valley Forge National Historical Park.

2007 was a year of solid progress at Valley Forge National Historical Park. Here are some of the highlights that we've outlined in the 2007 Annual Report. You can also read the full report on our website. www.nps.gov/vafo.

Park Staff continues to work hard to anticipate the needs of our visitors and to expand programming to reach more visitors. Again this year, new choices were added to the menu of programs, and existing programs and services were improved and expanded. Many of these choices were made possible through partnerships and volunteers.

An enhanced partnership with Once Upon a Nation led to 40,000 visitors enjoying new programs and services. Storytelling benches were placed at the Welcome Center, National Memorial Arch, and Washington's Headquarters. Once Upon a Nation also debuted "Valley Forge After Hours" tours during which visitors were transported back in time as members of a visiting congressional delegation to check on the state of the army.

The park's cooperating association, The Encampment Store purchased a trolley and worked with the park and Once Upon a Nation to expand existing fee based interpretive tours of the park. 6,500 people participated in the tours, a 5% increase over the previous year.

The 2nd Annual Revolutionary Run was held in partnership with the Valley Forge Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Friends of Valley Forge, and 12 other sponsors. This 5 mile race is sanctioned by Mid-Atlantic USA Track and Field. Supported by 160 volunteers, 1,263 runners and walkers participated in the race, a walk, and a youth fun run through the park. Registration is open for the April 20, 2008 run at www.revolutionaryrun.org.

More, and better programming, the provision of more ways to experience the park, and our marketing partnership with the Valley Forge Convention and Visitors Bureau continue to result in increases in visitation and participation. The number of regularly scheduled, distinct program offerings doubled this year. We extended our summer season and created a more robust spring and fall program. The number of visitors experiencing park and partner programs increased 30% of 2006. In 2007, total park visitation increased 3.86% over 2006.

The hard work of previous years' reorganization of the Law Enforcement Division and its operations has borne fruit in terms of smoother and more effective operations.

Valley Forge NHP is the first National Park approved to use JNET (Justice Network) and the Mid Atlantic Great Lakes Organized Crime Law Enforcement Network. Valley Forge will also serve as a hub to the 13 other National Park Units in the state of Pennsylvania, so that they can have access to these networks also.

To complete the dispatch transition from National Park Service to Montgomery County Emergency Dispatch Operations, a final set of portable radios was purchased and installed, replacing those that had been loaned out. Through new laptop computers, rangers now have an increased connection to the outside world and immediate access to law enforcement information.

Law Enforcement volunteers participating in the Park Watch contributed 995 hours of service patrolling on foot and bike and helping with special events.

Staff spent over 700 hours to prepare equipment and vehicle for inclement weather conditions and remove snow and ice from park roads and parking lots. This work allowed the park to remain open to visitors during the worst of weather conditions.

FY 2007 was the first year with a Natural Resources Manager in place, and exceptional progress was made.

Through the Philadelphia Chapter of the Garden Club of America's Partners for Plants program, funding and volunteers were provided to the park to complete and inventory rare plants

We treated invasive plants on 80 canopy acres in the park , working with the National Park Service Mid Atlantic Exotic Plant Management Team, park staff, interns, and volunteers.

Red-bellied turtles, a state-listed threatened species, were found in the park in 2006, but limited information was available about their distribution. Park interns worked with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission to survey 516 acres for nesting sites and to document over a mile of Schuylkill River banks for basking sites.

Cultural Resources management focused on planning and preparation for upcoming major capital improvements.

Construction drawings and contract awards were completed for phase II of the historic rehabilitation of the Washington's Headquarters Area. This phase includes restoration of the historic Valley Forge Train Station and re-use for visitor orientation.

A Cultural Landscape Treatment Plan for the Washington's Headquarters area was completed. The park wide Cultural Landscape Treatment Plan also was started and will be completed in FY 08.

A milestone was reached with the signing of the Record of Decision selecting a remedial action for clean up of the 112 acre asbestos dump site in the park. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the United States continued negotiations to reach a settlement on the allocation of the remediation costs.

The park enjoys core partnerships with three very strong organizations, as well as with numerous regional and national organizations. This reflects our strategic decision to emphasize working with partners and volunteers both to gain from their expertise and connections, and also to provide them with the outstanding experiences and benefits of working in a national park.

The Encampment Store continues to be a critical partner in improving the quality of the visitor experience. The Encampment Store worked closely with the park on creative development and staffing of all our special events, development of interpretive and education programming, and the creation of education products for our visitors.

The Friends of Valley Forge Park continued to grow into a larger, more active organization. New board leadership, a revitalized mission statement, and active interaction with park management is transforming the park's oldest partner. Membership increased to over 400 individuals from 100 in early 2006! As part of the Washington's Headquarters Area rehabilitation project, the Friends also have pledged \$50,000 toward development of a multi-media show that will introduce visitors to the important stories associated with this area. Visit www.friendsofvalleyforge.org for more information.

The Valley Forge Convention and Visitors Bureau continued to serve as an invaluable partner in promoting the park to visitors and opinion-makers, and helping us to understand, serve, and manage our visitors. The CVB spearheads and prints the semi-annual park program guides, collaborates on press releases, ensures information is distributed to wide assortment of media outlets, keeps numerous tourism websites updated with park information, provides film and still photographers for professional shots of park events, provides expert advice and consultation, and serves as an excellent liaison to hotels and other components of the vibrant regional tourism industry. See www.valleyforge.org.

Two years ago we looked ahead and projected a 10% decline in "buying power" of our federal budget by 2019. We developed and are implementing a five year Business-Plan to enable us to absorb the increasing shortfalls and provide greater financial flexibility while still meeting our goals for greater preservation of our historic and natural resources and for providing visitor services.

With the completion of the new General Management Plan, the park will continue to move toward a future of more choices for visitors and more flexibility in funding and staffing. We are moving toward a future in which the park will serve as a life long classroom on the American Revolution and a healthy regional bio-refuge. And Valley Forge, an essential American icon will continue to be a treasured place supported by the ongoing efforts of an engaged and committed group of citizen stewards, and a growing network of partners.

That's all for this month's "View from the Forge." As always, for more information visit the park's website at www.nps.gov/vafo.

Please come back next month for a new edition of "The View from the Forge" and remember to look for our other podcasts on iTunes titled *Valley Forge History and Culture*, and *Valley Forge Nature and Science*.